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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION; MIDDLE EAST; HUGO CHAVEZ; LATIN AMERICA IN
THE US ELECTION CAMPAIGN; 06/25/07

1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Weekend international opinion pieces cover the US and Israel's strategy on the Middle East; the decline of Venezuelan Hugo Chavez's popularity in opinion surveys; and the inclusion of Latin America in the US election campaign.

2. OPINION PIECES AND EDITORIALS

- "Middle East - 'the worse, the better' strategy"

Oscar Raul Cardoso, international analyst of leading "Clarín," writes (06/23) "How can we understand that the confrontation between Hamas and Fatah... and the virtual separation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank make up a 'window of opportunity for peace' over which President George W. Bush was so enthusiastic when he received Israeli PM Ehud Olmert in Washington? There is something about this perspective that smells like poorly grounded opportunism.

"The armed confrontation in the Palestinian territories has been encouraged by both Israelis and Americans since Hamas' election victory..., although the final territorial division was not in their plans, neither was the suspicion that Hamas' extremists could go that far.

"... It seems now that this disaster seems to enable Jerusalem and Washington to bet on the Palestinian 'moderates' and ignore (without even blushing about it) that Hamas' election mandate is still valid. They will do it for the first time starting next Monday in the Egyptian tourist resort of Sharm el Sheik by accepting an invitation from President Hosni Mubarak.

"... Is it advisable that 'moderates' are seen as such by Palestinians themselves and by the rest of the Arab world? We could say so and also that the money they are promised from the West and Jerusalem will serve to show an example of the benefits rendered by moderation to those who still do not believe in it.

"However, we should not alter the natural order of priorities. Regardless of the Palestinians' economic weakness, their central problem is not money-related, but the transformation of their national identity into a State; and as long as no formula places a priority on this issue, no real progress will be made, with or without Hamas."

- "Socialism of the 21st century"

Daily-of-record "La Nación" carries an op-ed piece by writer Mario Vargas Llosa, who opines (06/23) "... According to an eloquent opinion survey carried out by Caracas' Hinterlaces Institute that was published by 'Veja' magazine, 78 per cent of Venezuelans

disapprove of Chavez's anti-US feeling; 85 percent of them condemn the political financing of other countries; 86 per cent do not want a Cuban-styled socialism; and also 86 per cent are against the seizure of private property.

"Furthermore, 40 percent of Venezuelans who voted for Chavez in the elections last December today declare that now they would vote against him.

"Therefore, there is still hope for Venezuela, and we can assert, without any fear of being wrong, that the 'socialism of the 21st century'... will soon pass into history as one more invention of those absurd dictatorships that are so plentiful in Latin America's history.

"What made millions of Venezuelans vote for Hugo Chavez so many times during recent years? The prevailing corruption in the political system and the inability of governments to fight poverty and social inequality... However, instead of voting for freedom, they put a sword to their throats by supporting a government that tripled the crime rate in five years, increased inflation, wasted public resources by funding Marxist extremism all over the hemisphere while giving life to the Cuban semi-corpse. Above all, it is a regime that has added new and more damaging forms of corruption to the many forms the country already had.

"Now, Commander Chavez knows that his unpopularity is growing by the day and this is why he is rushing to close the few remaining Venezuelan media outlets that still denounce his abuses. What happened with RCTV is only the beginning of a process that, just like in Cuba, will end up putting all Venezuelan mass media under the control of the Government, save, perhaps, two or three exceptions - allegedly independent companies (like Venevision...) - to maintain the farce of informative pluralism. However, if one takes into account the courageous reaction of students and people who formerly supported the regime, this incident could also be the

beginning of the end of the Chavist revolution."

- "Latin America is almost absent from the US election campaign"

Hugo Alconada Mon, Washington-based correspondent for daily-of-record "La Nacion," writes (06/24) "Iraq, Iraq, Iraq... and also, Iran and North Korea. These are the obvious foreign policy priorities for those fighting to enter the White House.

"Only after this, do they tackle the (US) ties to Europe, China, the Middle East, Africa and the rest of the world, including Latin America. And only two, Barack Obama and John McCain, have mentioned Argentina.

"The rejection of George W. Bush, his views, his policies and his legacy has become basic instinct among opponents and also among Republicans.

"If there was any doubt, the dozen Democratic and Republican candidates with serious potential for taking office in 2008, either as president or VP, took distance from Bush. Republicans clearly distanced themselves from him during last May's debate. They mentioned Ronald Reagan 19 times for his leadership, his ability and his view. They only mentioned Bush once. McCain stands alone in maintaining that troops should stay in Iraq.

"McCain, who is running third among Republicans, made the first and most critical comment about Argentina during the only lecture he has given so far to explain his view on Latin America, in which he called Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez a 'dictator.'

"The senator lashed out against 'the chaotic Tri-Border Area, which he called 'a paradise for smugglers and radical groups,' and he recalled that 'Iran launched terrorist attacks in Argentina.'

"Democrat senator Barack Obama made a minor gesture towards Argentina - he promised that he would reestablish US ties to the region in an article published by the prestigious magazine Foreign Affairs.

"... Both political parties reject Chavez outright ... and everyone

agrees to condemn Fidel Castro."

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